

## ***Oral History Cover Sheet***

**Name:** Eldridge Hunt

**Date of Interview:** January 10, 2006

**Interviewer:** David Smith

**Offices and Field Stations Worked:** California Department of Fish and Game

**Positions Held:** Chief of the Wildlife Management Division

**Most Important Projects:** North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Pacific Flyway, population management, habitat management,

**Colleagues and Mentors:** Jack Grieb

National Heritage Team of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Oral History Program

Narrator/USFW Retiree: Eldridge "Red" Hunt

Date: January 10, 2001

Interviewed by: David Smith

David Smith: We're here to talk for a few minutes about the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. You've been involved in it from day one, so we want to pick your brain about that. Could you just tell us a little bit about your professional career?

Eldridge Hunt: Yes. My whole professional career was with the California Department of Fish and Game. During the time that I was involved with the North American Waterfowl Plan, I was Chief of the Wildlife Management Division for the California Department of Fish and Game. In that position, I spent a lot of time working with the Pacific Flyway, and that was my entry into the program, through the flyway, representing the Pacific Flyway.

David Smith: Do you remember the first time you touched or heard about the North American Waterfowl Management Plan?

Eldridge Hunt: I sure do. It was at a flyway meeting and Jack Grieb, who was involved with the Pacific Flyway and in the writing of the plan, came to the flyway and talked about it. There wasn't complete acceptance on the part of the flyway at that time. They were concerned that the plan, in some way, would get involved in harvest or population management and the flyway figured that that was their piece of the cake and they didn't want anybody interfering. So, they made it very clear to Grieb that they wanted protection. When I was first appointed that was the direction they gave me, was to not let this group get involved in population management. So, that was the way we started out.

David Smith: To follow up on that, how has that played out over the years with the flyway council initially very concerned about population, regulation, and harvest? What focus did the waterfowl plan take if it wasn't population?

Eldridge Hunt: Right. Well, it was basically a habitat plan, and kind of separate it from population, but the objectives of the habitat plan was measured in population. So, there certainly is a connection between the two.

Over the years, I think the flyway, particularly Pacific Flyway, has mellowed and recognized the need for the plan to get at least somewhat involved in population management. That's played out with the participation of the flyways on the SSD [Special Service District] teams and so forth, they are much more cooperative then they were at the beginning. And I think that's one of the reasons for their success, that the flyways are more comfortable with the program now they see the great benefits. I think they feel that

that's probably the best way to get the management of resource accomplished, in terms of habitat, is through this international program.

David Smith: That's a good point. People now, almost 20 years later, sometimes look at the waterfowl plan as a tremendous success and don't realize there was pain in giving birth to this plan. It's an interesting perspective.

Any other areas of controversy, difficulty that you recall from when then this plan became established?

Eldridge Hunt: Well, the thing that I remember first of controversy is the first update and I think that there was a general feeling among the members that there was a need to go all bird or all wildlife at that time. So, I think that probably resulted in a meeting in Washington D.C., where all of the folks that were interested in the plan being called together to find out whether they thought that that change should be made at that point in time. Due to the testimony, found out that it was pretty well on track the way it was originally written. So that's the way it came out in the first update.

David Smith: Let me ask you this, Red, can you point to any particularly significant accomplishments, events that led to the development of the waterfowl plan --- the period before it was signed and since it was signed? Are there key milestones that you can point to?

Eldridge Hunt: I think in my mind the most significant, harking back to involvement with the flyway, and I was particularly involved in harvest management and so forth, and quite aware of the need for habitat management, and we saw this as the great step of getting work done particularly in the prairies of Canada. California had been involved in supporting Canadian projects for some time, and we were very impressed with the accomplishments primarily the DU [Ducks Unlimited] was making up there. We saw this just as a great opportunity to further develop habitat in the prairies in Canada, so that was our original focus. It was quite narrow at that time and, of course, has broadened since then.

David Smith: That's key. You mentioned the first update, which I believe was in 1994, as a key point. Since then, there have been several other updates?

Eldridge Hunt: Two.

David Smith: Have they... What impact has that process of periodic updating had on the plan, if any, would you say?

Eldridge Hunt: I think it had major [impact]. I think that the fact, there's two couple of factors that speak to this. I know of no other wildlife plan that has been effective over that period of time. Usually a plan is developed and it works for four or five years and then it is discarded, so to speak. But there's been so much effort in updating and revising the plan, that it stays current. To me, that's one of the major reasons for success, is that it is updated on a five year increment and a great deal of effort

goes into getting input from the constituencies. It takes a lot of time to do that, but I think it's well worthwhile, that everybody that's interested gets a chance to comment and make the plan current. And I think that has been very significant in its success.

David Smith: That's a good point. If the updating, periodic updating, five year updates have been influential, can you point to anything else that has made --- and you mentioned that the waterfowl plan has lasted longer than any other...

Eldridge Hunt: As far as that, yes.

David Smith: You mentioned the updating process, can you point to any other key characteristics or components of the waterfowl plan that have enabled it to survive 25 years, apparently in good condition and still going strong?

Eldridge Hunt: I think the joint venture of partnership concept has got to be key in that. This was kind of new in the wildlife field, and I think it's been followed by many other wildlife initiatives as the way to go. The other thing that comes to my mind is the way the relationship of the planning committee and the service to the joint ventures, and letting each one be individual in terms of their procedures, and settle on what works best for them as opposed to all going with the same process and procedure. The freedom for the joint ventures to do what fits in best with them, I think, is very important.

David Smith: You've participated in a number of joint ventures, personally in management awards and [visiting] at various capacities. In a nutshell, for people that don't know exactly what a joint venture is, how would you describe what a waterfowl plan joint venture is?

Eldridge Hunt: Well, I don't know, we can go back originally to the 32... There were areas that were identified as important waterfowl areas in Canada and the U.S. I believe there were 32 or 32. And there was originally five of those areas that were selected for the original joint ventures. That has been expanded, and I'm not sure the number now, what is it 13 now or 11? Something like that, but it's almost doubled, and the door is not shut now, if there's need for additional joint ventures I'm sure they will come onboard.

In our flyway we have four joint ventures, and they're all different as night and day and they all, I feel, do well for their location and for their management boards. I think one of the things that we've done over a period of time from your office in the planning committee is meet with those joint ventures and get from them their needs and also offer information about how best to proceed. I think that's greatly appreciated and should be continued.

David Smith: Let me follow up, you were talking about one of the keys here in the joint venture partnership concept and that the whole organization, the planning committee and the Fish and Wildlife Service had given joint ventures the freedom to be individual to get the job done. To some people that would seem as not highly controlled,

not highly structured --- how in the world can something that's a loose structure be so successful?

Eldridge Hunt: We didn't have strong direction or control.

David Smith: Is that a paradox or is that a truth?

Eldridge Hunt: Well, I think that most people would believe that it would fail. But I think, and I don't why it hasn't, but the partnerships are so strong, I think, that they have prevailed. Despite the lack of strong authority at the top and strong direction, they have done well for what they needed to do. I think the reason for that is that the needs are so different in the different joint ventures, that to apply the procedure of one, and I know speaking of our flyway, one procedure of one joint venture to the others would be harmful.

David Smith: Thank you. Let me ask you this, we've talked about the early days and through joint ventures and through the updates, is there anything else you would like to add from your experience with the plan, with the planning committee, with joint ventures, or...?

Eldridge Hunt: I think that one of the things that we haven't talked at all about is the inclusion of the other initiatives in the joint ventures. Most of the joint ventures are all bird now, and the way that has transpired, with basically the only funding for the waterfowl element, and yet the joint ventures have gone ahead and brought funding in for projects for the other initiatives where the money was available, and this has been done without a great deal of bickering. Originally, when our thinking was real narrow, I know I didn't think that this was going to be possible, I thought there was always going to be conflict between waterfowl and the others, and this has proven not to be the case in the joint ventures that I've had experience with. And that was a great revelation.

David Smith: You've cited several examples where people didn't think it could be done, from the waterfowl plan itself, to joint ventures themselves, to being able to get money to flow to Canada, to joint ventures being able to embrace birds beyond waterfowl and make it all work. So, a lot of doubting seems to have turned into a lot of accomplishment.

Eldridge Hunt: Yeah, you wonder why that happened! Whether it was just luck or...

David Smith: That's very impressive.

Eldridge Hunt: Yeah, it is very. It is the most, in my career, which, well, I'll be off the plan committee this spring, but in my career that expanded almost 60 years, involvement in the North American [Waterfowl Plan] is by far the most interesting and significant thing that I had known. It kind of climaxed here, this has been great coming here to this session and seeing what you have to offer here.

David Smith: Well, I congratulate you on that time and thank you for all of your contributions, really. That's very, very significant.

Eldridge Hunt: I'll just add one thing, that I was the, the other thing I should have brought out, that I was fortunate to be able to be involved in both the planning committee and the council staff, and been the only one. It was great to know what the concepts were in the plan, and to see how they were actually implemented through the council. I would strongly recommend, that wherever possible, that representation on both parts of the plan involve the same state, the same flyway, same individual. It's been helpful.

David Smith: Well thank you Red, that really is an incredible accomplishment that you have done.

Eldridge Hunt: Well it's been fun, this has really been enjoyable. I don't know what it would have all been without it.

**Key Words (Please highlight or circle those described in the interview):**

refuges	fisheries	law	ecological serv.	personnel
		enforcement		
realty	director	public affairs	game	contaminants
animal damage	river basins	Regions 1-9__	Patuxent	Federal Aid
international	CITES	habitat	ESA	wilderness
fishing	hunting	birding	boats	aviation
surveys	flyways	waterfowl	potholes	migration
eagles	condors	cranes	pesticides	pelicans
Olaus Murie	Ding Darling	Ira Gabrielson	J. Clark Salyer	Al Day
Rachel Carson	H. Zahniser	Dan Jantzen	J. Gottschalk	J. Gottschalk
Spencer Smith	L. Greenwalt	Bob Jantzen	Frank Dunkle	John Turner
M. Beattie	Aldo Leopold	Stuart Udall	James Watt	Bruce Babbitt
inventions	research	ecosystems	invasive species	reintroductions
red wolves	gray wolves	Mexican wolf	condors	spotted owl